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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the most frequently used rental items for university outdoor programs and describes strategies for saving money in purchasing equipment. A 1983 survey of 11 university programs indicated that the most frequently available rental items for summer and winter were sleeping bags, tents, backpacks, cross-country skis, and snowshoes. Applying financial and service criteria helps identify rental items essential for program activities. Criteria include the ranking of items by total rental frequency, total gross income, and per-item income; and the collection of data about other outdoor programs and their equipment needs. Purchasing methods include buying equipment through local retailers, university purchasing departments, and trade shows. Appropriate purchasing terms can save money, including closeouts, observing time limits for payment of merchandise, quality discounts, and preseason discounts. Attending trade shows offers advantages such as getting the best price for equipment, being able to compare products and prices, becoming aware of trends in outdoor equipment, and having opportunities for training and development. The paper includes a list of trade shows and suggestions for preparing and participating in trade shows. (LP)

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The Top Rental Items For University Outdoor Programs and Effective Buying Techniques

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Abstract—The top rental items for university outdoor programs are discussed. Specific effective buying techniques explain how a savings of $58,000 in one week was made by spending $600. Methods and techniques for finding, obtaining, and lowering the cost of equipment prices from outdoor vendors and equipment sources are described.

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Outdoor Equipment Rental Services

Extracurricular university outdoor programs typically offer one or more of these four services: (a) retail sales, (b) repairs (usually bike and ski), (c) programs (clinics, trips, slide shows, events, etc.), and (d) equipment rentals. In 1990, 116 outdoor programs (about 77% of the outdoor programs at four year colleges and universities) collected over $150,000, 38 other programs each collected between $10,000 - $70,000, and 75 other programs each collected less than $10,000.

Equipment rentals, besides being a possible source of potential revenue, permit an outdoor program "piece of mind" in knowing that the program has the ability to provide the right kind, quality, and quantity of equipment for its programmatic needs.

Summer and Winter Rental Items

In 1983, a survey indicated what the most frequently available summer rental items were at 11 university programs west of the Mississippi River: (a) sleeping bags (84%), (b) tents (69%), (c) backpacks (68%), (d) stoves (47%), (e) coolers (21%), (f) rafts (21%), (g) canoes (16%), (h) innertubes (11%), (i) ice axes (11%), (j) lanterns (11%), (k) sleeping pads (11%), (l) wetsuits

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(5%), (m) volleyball sets (5%), (n) climbing equipment (5%), (o) fishing gear (5%), and (p) cooking gear (5%).

The same study indicated that the winter items most available were: (a) x-c skis (74%), (b) snowshoes (63%), (c) tents (53%), (d) backpacks (53%), (e) sleeping bags (47%), (f) ice axes (11%), (g) innertubes (11%), (h) gaiters (11%), (i) stoves (11%), and (j) ice skates (5%). Just because 74% of these universities rent cross-country skis doesn't mean your organization should, or that cross-country ski rentals are a good choice for a school now renting them.

Rental Item Criteria

Financial and service criteria to evaluate items in existing rental programs could include ranking items by total rental frequency, ranking rental items by total gross income, ranking items by per item income, and identifying which items are essential for a program activity.

Gross Rental Frequency

To identify the rental item with the most rental frequency, the rental area collects information on how many times a specific type of item was rented. The University of Calgary (1988) rental item with the most rental frequency was sleeping bags with 4700 bag rentals, second was telemark boots with 4687 boot rentals. Their second lowest rental frequency was snowboards with 161 rentals, and lowest rental frequency was pulk-shuttles with 84 rentals. Brigham Young University's (BYU) most frequent rental (1988) was downhill ski packages with 4332 rentals, and the second most frequent rental item was the x-c ski package with 1156 rentals. BYU's least frequent rental were 4 gallon jugs with no rentals and badminton sets with one rental. Identifying items with a high rental frequency can suggest what items to increase or decrease in quantity or price.

Items by Gross Income

To identify the rental item with the largest grossing income, the total income generated for a specific type of item needs to be collected. The University of Calgary's (1988) largest income grossing rental items were 124 sleeping bags generating $20,193 and second largest was 125 telemark boots generating $15,055. The lowest income grossing items were 5 snowboards making $812 and 3 pulk-shuttles making $633 in Canadian dollars. BYU's highest grossing income items were 216 downhill ski packages generating $50,215, 88 cross country ski packages generating $7,781 and lowest grossing items, 17 camp grills grossing $2.50 and 2 hatchets at $0.00. Identifying items with a large or small gross income indicates what is making the bulk of the rental income which can guide the increase or decrease of inventory items.

Per Item Income

To identify the per item income, the following formula is used. Gross item income divided by total number of items divided by purchase price of the item. This will either be a positive or negative dollar amount. If it is positive, then the item generates income, if it is negative, the item requires a subsidy or a longer amount of time to realize a break even or a positive financial return. BYU's high per item income's were 2 Tug-o-war ropes costing $1.00 each rented 80 times with a gross income of $369.00 resulting in a 18,450% return on investment,

Twister game a 1,230% return, and snow toboggans a 877% return. In comparison x-c ski package only had a 77% return and the down hill skis a 116% return. The percentage return only indicates income above the purchase price of the item. For the outdoor programs that have operational costs paid for by student fees or other subsidy sources, the additional income can be used to buy more or better equipment. For those programs that don't receive subsidies, the income can be used to pay student and staff wages or other operating expenses or to purchase new equipment.

Program Items

Identifying which items are essential for a program activity is not difficult. These are items that individuals typically don't have or are critical for group outings. By all other criteria BYU should not have a bike trailer in it's rental inventory, except that it can carry gear underneath and bikes on top for 22 people. Pulk-sleds for carrying gear cross country skiing is a poor rental item financially and operationally, but they add a degree of safety by being able to carry injured people and therefore remain as a rental item. Compasses are not a financially successful rental item, they have a very low rental frequency, yet for orienteering programs nothing else will serve that need.

Data and Principled Acquisitions

To build or improve a rental program, collect data. Identify what you are now doing. Visit, call, and study other programs, local and distant, and compare what you do (or plan to do) with what they are doing. After collecting objective data, make your decisions and implement your plan. Don't fall into the trap of getting the equipment you personally want, instead of getting the equipment that your program operationally needs, and the students (patrons) want.

Purchasing Methods

Now that you have assessed your needs and identified what you ought to buy, how do you get the most and pay the least?

Local Retailers

The "expensive" way is to go down to the local outdoor shop and have the local outdoor store sell to you at retail or retail with a 5-15% discount. For example, sleeping bags cost the retailer $70.00. He adds a 60% markup and prices them at $112. He gives you a 10% discount and you pay him $100.80. You save $11.20 per bag. The retailer makes $30.80 on each bag.

University Purchasing Departments

The "easy" way is to have the university purchasing department find some sleeping bags. They will try to find the least expensive bag that meets your specifications. They easily can compare costs, but usually don't have the experience to compare the benefits of different bag manufacturers or sleeping bag features. They probably will be able to get the bags for wholesale. For example, if your purchasing department picks the same bag that you selected

in the first example, you would pay $70.00 for the bags, saving $30.80 per bag buying direct rather than buying through the local store. If you were buying 10 bags you would save $308 buying them factory direct, or instead of buying 10 bags from the local shop for $1008, you could buy from the factory 15 bags for $1050.

Trade Shows

This is the way I like to make most of my purchases. The "pay less than wholesale" way can be done if you (a) understand and use buying terms to your advantage and (b) wisely use buying trade shows to your advantage. First let's look at purchasing terms.

Just as there is a wide range that an item could be sold for at retail, there is a wide range that an item could be sold at wholesale. Here are some payment terms that could reduce the price you pay.

Purchasing Terms

1. Closeouts. These are items that the manufacturer or distributor wants to get rid of. They may be last years model, or color, or style, or may have a cosmetic or functional flaw. Ask if they have closeouts, and why they are closing them out. I've paid $45 instead of $89 (wholesale) for semi-dry suits that had a tight ankle seam (functional flaw) which we would easily repair when or if it ripped out. I've also paid $200 for kayaks with a bad paid job (cosmetic flaw) instead of the usual $399-$450 (wholesale). I've paid $45 a pair for metal edge touring skis instead of $119 (wholesale) because they were last years model and didn't have this years "paint job".

2. Dating. This refers to extensions of credit often 30, 60, 90 days, even 1 or 2 years. It describes the time limits for payment of merchandise. For example, I receive ski products in October but don't have to pay the invoice until March because of 120 days dating. Dating can be expressed a variety of ways:

- **5% 10th/net 30** means that you will be invoiced on the 1st day of the month and you must pay by the 30th, however, if you pay on or before the 10th of the month you can discount your bill by 5%.

- **5% 30/net 60 FFA** means that you will be invoiced on the 1st day of the month and you must pay within 60 days, however, if you pay within 30 days you can discount your bill by 5% and FFA (Full Freight Allowance) deduct the cost of freight off of the invoice.

- **2/10 EOM** means that you can discount your bill by 2% if you pay within 10 days, full payment due at the End Of the Month.

- **2 year dating** means that you get the product now but don't have to pay for it for 2 years. Ski companies are ones likely to have this program. This would allow you to buy ski boots now and pay for them this year, and skis now and pay for them next year. The drawback to this is the skis might cost $95 for a one year dating program and $99 for a two year dating program. You are being charged interest.

3. Anticipation. Universities can use anticipation to their advantage because universities don't have the same cash flow problems stores have. If a company has a long dating terms as a regular part of doing business, if you pay sooner than required (anticipating the payment date), they may give a discount. For example, I receive skis in October and must pay for them on March 1. There is a 1.5% per month anticipation. If I pay for them in the end of October then I have anticipated making the payment before the months of November, December, January, and February, which is 4 months at 1.5% per month equalling a 6% discount.

4. Quantity Discount. When you buy more of an item and the price per item goes down, you are receiving a quantity discount. Using skis as an example, for each 25-50 additional pairs bought you might receive an additional 1% discount.

5. Pre-season Discount. A pre-season discount is the discount you receive for placing an order within a time period prior to the main season for selling that item. Orders placed in April for ski goods you will receive next October might receive a 1-5% pre-season discount.

Purchasing example

Let's use these terms and make some imaginary purchases. We need 24 pairs of skis whose base wholesale price is $119. We find out that in the larger and smaller sizes we can buy last years ski on "closeout" for $49 each or $588 for 12 pairs. The other 12 pair of skis we pay $119 times 12 skis ($1428) minus 5% pre-season discount ($1,428 - 5% = $1, 356.60), 0% discount for quantity, 1.5% per month with a 3 month maximum anticipation discount ($1,356.60 - 4.5% = $1,295.55). If we had bought 24 skis at $119 it would cost $2,856. By buying closeouts, and applying pre-season and anticipation discounts we only pay $1,833.55 saving $972,45. If airline, hotel, food, etc. for the trade show cost $600 the subtract $600 from the $972,45 savings and there is still a $372.45 savings. If other savings were realized at the same trade show where the ski purchases were made, then the savings would be greater. At the 1990 United Ski Industries of America annual trade show i ended up paying $33,000 for items whose base wholesale price was $42,000 and suggested retail value was $80,000. This savings was directly related to my attending the trade show and asking and taking every discount available. Although there is some expense to attending trade shows, over the last nine years I have saved #3 in equipment purchases for every $1 spent in attending trade shows. Wisely selecting items and purchasing wisely (or guiding you purchase department wisely) will allow you to provide more and better equipment at lower costs. Besides, it's fun to make good buying decisions!

Trade Show Tips

Why should outdoor programers attend trade shows? What trade shows should they attend? How should they prepare for trade shows?

Discounts on purchases. The first reason for trade show attendance is to save money. I've indicated that at one trade show I paid $33.000 for items whose wholesale price was $42,000 and retail value was $80,000. I paid $11,000 below wholesale as a result of going to the trade show. It cost $600 for the transportation, food, lodging and miscellaneous for me to go and

6 days of time. By going to the trade show I saved the outdoor program from having to spend $10,400, or saved $1711 per day for six days. The first reason for trade show attendance is to save money by using trade show discounts and special pricing.

Comprehensive product and price comparison. The second reason to attend trade shows is to be able to see products and compare prices. Looking at items in catalogs has little value when compared with looking and perhaps briefly using the items as part of a trade show. Looking at prices in one catalog and comparing them with prices in another catalog has little value when compared with looking at prices in one catalog with the manufacturers sales representative, with both of you knowing that later you will be in a competitors trade show booth looking at the competitors product and pricing. In the competitive environment of a trade show sales "reps" try harder to price their product lower. When you can see, handle, and try a product you have a greater chance of selecting the product best suited for the job. Technical or product information can be given to you, at times by the designer or owner of the company. This allows you to make a better choice because you have better information when selecting equipment for your program. Because the best product was selected it should last longer, require fewer repairs, reduce administrative time in replacing it, bring greater patron satisfaction and in the long run generate more income. The second reason for trade show attendance is to save money by buying the right product for the right price.

Awareness of trends. A third reason to attend trade shows is to be able to see generally the direction an entire industry is moving as well as specific items that may be the hot new or tired old trend. When Burton Snowboards continued to grow and other companies started building snowboards, or when Rollerblades broaden their market and other companies started building in-line-skates, many outdoor programs (if they weren't already renting snowboards or in-line-skates) were quick to catch up with outdoor programs and shops that were already renting and selling these products. A third reason for trade show attendance is to save money by buying the right product at the right time and to stop buying products at the right time.

Training and development. A fourth reason to attend trade shows is to be able to attend technical and educational sessions. Outdoor companies and associations frequently present seminars regarding products, trends, and management. At Expo West (the trade show for backpacking, camping, climbing, and paddle boating manufacturers, distributors, and buyers) held this August 1991, the seminars included topics on:

- "The Sixth Annual Paddlesports Seminar" by *Canoe Magazine, Outdoor Retailer, and DuPont.*
- "Product Liability and Negligence Concerns" by North American Paddlesports Association.
- "Towards a Greener Outdoor Industry: Recycling and Beyond" by Recycling Resource.
- "CEN Standardization and Certification" (European climbing gear manufacturing standards) by the Climbing Sports Group/Outdoor Recreation Coalition of America (ORCA).

- "General Meeting" by the Trade Association of Sea Kayaking.

- "Preserving the Wondrous Tatshenshini Rivers" by Michael Down /Tatshenshini Wild Conservation Alliance.

I have attended seminars about bicycle wheel building, marketing, ski tuning, hiring, advertising, putting on special events, safety, customer service and more all for free as part of the trade show. At Expo West an afternoon and evening is spend on a river in Reno. All the canoe, kayak and sea kayak manufacturers have 80+% of their boats on the river bank for trade show attendees to take for test paddles on the river. I spent 3 hours paddling, spending 5-10 minutes in a boat. This allowed me to feel more confident about how these boats perform than just talking to someone who has paddled them. After paddling the open cockpit sea kayaks and talking with the sales rep it was easy to select the boats for our outdoor program base on comparative performance and comparative pricing. Knowledge is power. Acquiring, strengthening, and sharpening your knowledge will allow you to provide a better service and outdoor program. A fourth reason for trade show attendance is to save money by attending technical and educational sessions (for free).

Build relationships. A fifth reason to attend trade shows is to be able to strengthen relationships. By meeting sales representatives and outdoor equipment company management you begin to establish a relationship. Significant leaders in the climbing, skiing, bicycling professions and other can become acquaintances. Later when a company has a special that will help your program, the sales rep might call you so you can take advantage of the opportunity. When you need help, the company management remembers you and may be able to help your program. Sports figures "drop in" and/or keep you informed about their lecture circuit. College outdoor program professionals have been staying together in the same motels while attending trade shows. The camaraderie and networking that occurs is valuable, but perhaps even more valuable is the sharing with one another of special products and prices that they individually discover at the trade show. This sometimes results in group buying that benefits all! A fifth reason for trade show attendance is to save money by building relationships that sooner or later save money or solve problems.

Besides saving money, selecting the appropriate equipment, building relationships, and gaining knowledge -- trade shows are fun! They are hard work, but for "gear hogs" fun work.

Trade Shows You Might Attend

The trade shows that have served my needs the best are these:

1. Expo West. This is the trade show for backpacking, camping, climbing, and paddle boating manufacturers, distributors, and buyers. The show has been growing and could be the only show many outdoor programs would need to attend, especially if you don't buy any type of snow skis. Approximately five acres of gear to look at in a three day period. Contact: OUTDOOR RETAILER EXPOS, telephone (714) 499-4591.

2. USIA (United Ski Industries of America). Seventeen acres of ski related equipment and five acres of backpacking camping, climbing, and other type gear. This is the show to attend if you buy downhill and x-c skis as well as other gear. Contact USIA, telephone (703) 556-

9020.

3. Outdoor Retailer Winter Market. This trade show is the same show by the same people that put on Expo West in August in Reno with the difference being that at the Winter Market two to three days of demo-ing x-c skis at Solitude Ski Resort is done (instead of the paddle boat demos). If you don't need paddle boats or downhill skis, this is the show to attend. Contact OUTDOOR RETAILER EXPOS, telephone (714) 499-4591.

4. Interbike: This is the west coast trade show for bicycles. Seven to eight acres of bicycles. A week later this show is held in Atlantic City, New Jersey for those on the East Coast. If you are selling, renting, or repairing mountain or road bicycles, one of these shows is a must. Contact: Interbike Expos, telephone (714) 722-0990.

5. ABIA (American Boardsailing Industries Association): This is the show to attend for buying windsurfing gear. You can spend two days of testing sailboards (waiting and rigged on the beach) and two more days in the exhibit hall. One year at this show I bought full wetsuits for 25$ each. I had gone planning to buy 30 wetsuits and to spend $65-$75 for each one. The savings from that wetsuit purchase paid for the whole trip and I was able to buy more than twice as many wetsuits than I had planned! Contact AWIA, telephone (800) 333-2242.

6. America Outdoors: Formerly the Eastern Professional River Outfitters and the Western River Guides Association, now joined together and called America Outdoors. Their annual convention and trade show is held in December with the location changing each year. This is the convention and show to attend if you are buying rafts and rafting gear. Contact America Outdoors, telephone (303) 377-4811 or (612) 524-1045.

Attendance Frequency

I wish I could say that I go to all these shows every year but I don't. I haven't bought sailboards for 4 years and it's been four years since I went to the ABIA. I plan to go in two years when its time to buy new sailboards and wetsuits. In 9 years I missed the USIA show only once. The America Outdoors (rafting) convention is on I attend every 3-4 years when we need to by rafting gear. I have stopped going to Interbike, but my student bicycle manager and student assistant bike managers have gone in my place for the last 4 years. I have even gone to the general sporting goods shows like the NSGA (National Sporting Goods Association-Anaheim, CA) in the Fall or the Super Show (Atlanta, GA) in February. These shows are good for team sports but had very little value for outdoor programming and outdoor adventure sports. If you deal in SCUBA or another adventure sport specialty like bicycles, or windsurfing, there are other trade shows associated with that sport that would save you money by attending it before buying equipment.

Trade Show Preparation and Participation

Prepare for trade shows by P.L.A.N. and Before-During-After.

P. L. A. N.

1. P – Prepare: Prepare ahead of time. Know why you are there. Know what items and

how many of each you want to buy. Study the list of exhibiting manufacturers. Make appointments before the show or the first day with reps of the items you have questions about.

2. **L – Learn:** Learn the layout of the show. Review the floor plan of the exhibitors. Plan your appointments and item reviews by booth number to make the most efficient use of your time.

3. **A – Analyze:** Scrutinize the merchandise, compare comparative items. Examine prices and terms. Check the booths for new products and ideas.

4. **N – Network:** Encounter new manufacturers and products. Listen to the pros at the seminars and evening socials. Meet and share ideas with other university programers during the show.

Before arriving at the trade show

Pre-register for the trade show two to three months in advance. This is usually free, or at least cheaper than registering at the door. On site registration can waste one to three hours standing in lines. Book lodging two to three months in advance. Select a motel by getting a list from the Chamber of Commerce or the yellow pages in the phone book. Call to compare rates. Motels have several different rates for the same room. Ask for "business man's rate" or "show rate". Call the local outdoor program for recommendations. Ask other programers where they stay. Check several airlines and flights at different times of the day. If you're on a tight budget consider a "red-eye" flight. This flight leaves very late at night and arrives very early in the morning, is very inconvenient but cheap! Arrive the day before the show so you can be rested to begin the first day of the show. If you plan to arrive the day of the show and you have transportation, luggage, room, or show registration problems, you may miss 1 of the 3 days of the show. Plan one day to return. Trying to return the same day a show ends could make you miss the last day of the show.

During the trade show.

Dress professionally. To save money and time bring a cereal bowl and spoon, cereal, buy milk at a convenience store and have breakfast in your room. To save time and money stop at a convenience store for a sandwich, juice, and snacks to eat at the trade show (restaurants in the show do have food at two to three times the cost). Have plenty of business cards ready to hand out. Keep all of the business cards you are given by others in one place. On the first day walk up and down the aisles making brief stops only long enough to pick up catalogs, price lists and perhaps a very quick look at items. Make appointments for the next days. Get a general overview of the show. Note pads, pens, calculators and plenty of business cards, a comfortable, roomy, solid bag to carry catalogs, lunch and other items will be needed at the show. After spending eight to ten hours at the show, go where you can change clothes, relax for 10-15 minutes, eat dinner and then network with others to learn of items or prices; or study catalogs to develop a written list of questions for the rep the next day. Get some good sleep and repeat the process. After accomplishing your goals, check out the night-life and parties if you desire. If you write an order with a rep, have them fill out their order completely, listing all discount, delivery dates, payment dates with all calculations completely carried out. Make sure you get a copy.

After the trade show.

After returning home and taking care of things that have to be taken care of, go through the catalogs and business cards of others and throw s.
0ome away, file some, and use the rest to place orders. Create a file for that show and while the memories are fresh leave suggestions for next year.

Consider attending any relevant regional trade shows, especially "demo shows" to try equipment, before and after coming to the big one. Stay current by reading the trade magazines. Plan and play your cards right, and your next visit to a trade show can be financially, educationally, and programmatically beneficial and personally fun!

David J. Webb, CLP, has operated BYU Outdoors Unlimited since it's beginning 10 years ago. David has a B.S. and M.A. in Recreation Administration, Outdoor Education, and Community Education from Brigham Young University. He has been employed by the Ricks College Outdoor Program and has taught for the BYU Recreation Department, BYU PE Department, and BYU PE-Dance Department. He has served on both the NIRSA and the ACU-I Outdoor Recreation Committees 1988-91 and been an organizer of the 3rd, 4th, and 5th Outdoor Recreation Conferences. David has presented and published frequently, and is author of the Outdoor Recreation Program Directory & Data/Resource Guide. He is the first recipient of the "Leadership Award" presented at the 1990 national Conference on Outdoor Recreation. David has instructor certifications in windsurfing, rock/mountain climbing, rafting, skiing, etc. When he is not administrating or guiding, Dave enjoys spending time with his family, both in and out of the out-of-doors.